

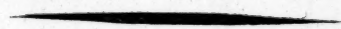
6

Made in America 28.

REFLECTIONS

ON OUR

Present Critical Situation.



[Price SIXPENCE.]

REFLECTIONS

O N

O U R P R E S E N T

Critical Situation.

In a LETTER from

A LANDED PROPRIETOR.

*Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.*

H O R.

L O N D O N,
Printed for J. WILLIAMS, No. 39, Fleet-Street.

M D C C L X X V I I .



REFLECTIONS

ON OUR

Present Critical Situation.

FELLOW-SUBJECTS!

THERE seems to be wanting but one circumstance to complete our national misfortunes; and this if I mistake not, and am allowed to judge by the pains taken, in every quarter of the kingdom, by the emissaries of administration, is now at hand; if our governors can again succeed in this instance, and lead a deluded and much-injured people, contrary to their interest, to adopt every rash, hasty, and extravagant measure, without attending

B

to

to the fatal consequences of their compliance. For in no other light, can any one, who thinks at all, consider AT THIS TIME a war with France. Let no one conceive, that I propose to vindicate that court, in the hostile part which it has taken, by encouraging and assisting the colonies, now waging war against the parent state: But I wish to point out to my countrymen, the real cause of our sufferings, to guard them against the artifices of the ministry and their adherents, who have worked on our passions, blinding us on the real state and condition into which they have drawn us; in order to cover over their faults, by raising our resentment, and by marking out others, though the natural objects, yet I will say, in this case, by no means the authors of those indignities, which we are hourly receiving.

It is in hopes of screening their own demerits from the inspection, just indignation, and resentment of the nation,
that

that they are eagerly expecting to see that disposition in the people, when they can be wild enough to call out for a war with France and its allies, to be added to that unnatural one, in which Great-Britain is now ingloriously engaged.

The losses we feel, and the disgraceful treatment we meet with, are the necessary consequences of the AMERICAN War: Let the advisers and promoters of that wretched measure colour it as they please; the people of this country must see, that they alone are the authors of our misfortunes; for it is to them that they most justly may say; " On your assertions we entered into this civil war; on your representations and assurances we depended on a certainty of success; you ventured to secure us against those consequences we now feel, and which others had predicted as inevitable; thus, either we have been grossly imposed upon by you, or yourselves have been totally ignorant of the ground on

which you have dared to stake the national interests : take it which way you will ; in the first you are criminal to the highest degree ; in the last, though not less so, a contempt for your political characters may save you from that vengeance, which is due to your presumption."

In a future letter, the ambitious causes which have prompted so many about the court to fall in with these pernicious measures, may be entered into more minutely : for I cannot put the abilities of all our rulers so low, as to suppose, that they all could consider those measures to be the best planned for the interests of Great-Britain, or the maintenance of this constitution. A part of them might hope at least, that, by a decisive blow, an extension of the power of the crown might follow a reunion with the colonies, brought about by victory ; and to be maintained by a MILITARY force alone. And thus to have forwarded a system, as dreadful
to

to the liberties of this country, as it is now favoured by them, and countenanced by too many amongst us.

The part which France has played is not unexpected: Every dispassionate and thinking person, or any one conversant at all in the politics of Europe, foresaw, that it would be, I might say, that it must be taken by that court. Every country has done, does, and ever will do the same, as often as the imprudent councils of a neighbouring rival give so inviting an opening, and so evident an advantage. Change the situations, and I am not going too far, when I assert that the ministers of this country would have more to answer, than they could clear to the public, if they let slip, and pass neglected a similar opportunity. However, the injuries we are receiving, must neither be forgiven, nor be forgot. Policy, which directs us to postpone our vengeance, until we are reconciled with the Colonies, (if we still dare to hope for the return of that joyful

joyful day) will urge us then to demand satisfaction, in the manner which the interests of this country may mark out as the most proper. But if the ministers dare trifle with our situation, and disregarding it, call down upon us, at such a moment as this, the whole armament of France, I will say that it is not, nor can it be for those purposes, for which they are endeavoring to inflame the people: For, unarmed and unprepared, as we are at home; abroad, no force beyond the demand, if equal to those services, on which it is engaged; a foreign war, at such a juncture, would add to our disgraces, instead of supporting the honor and dignity of the nation.

What is then their purpose? Their case is desperate; the nation reviving from its lethargy, is no longer to be soothed by their flattering promises; and general distrust threatens public credit. Our rulers thus alarmed and surrounded with difficulties, and conscious

conscious that their errors, not to say their crimes, must come before the public in their full light, catch at this most desperate of all steps, hoping in the general calamity to smother the guiltiness of their own conduct. For the people might, otherwise, still have leisure to demand a revision of their actions, and that the deceits, under which they have hitherto been held and led, be exposed to the open day. It is vain to think that they will be shielded under the sanction of parliament. The legislature, if it has been abused, will be the foremost to vindicate its own honor; and conscious apprehension of this single circumstance, is of itself so formidable, that we must not wonder, if ministry fly to every resource by which it may be prevented. But is Great-Britain to fall the continued victim to the errors of such men, or is she to be allowed to avoid one gulph, into which they desire to plunge the nation?

Let

Let us consider our situation at this moment; and not to paint the picture too black, I will touch on the principal great lines, and leave the researches of the reader, to enquire into more particular ones. Allow me only to state, that full employment is found for the sea and land forces, now beyond the Atlantic; and that no part of them can possibly be drawn from thence, for our internal defence; that, on a supposition of the militia, joined to the few regiments remaining here, being capable (for argument sake) of making us easy and secure at home, not one of the wide-extended possessions of this crown is equal to repelling a well-directed blow. Engaged already in one war, against the will, and contrary to the opinion of many; the justice of which war is questioned by a number of well-intentioned subjects, and the policy of it, now condemned by the major part of the people; we must be too blind not to foresee the internal confusion, to which misfortune will not fail to add

fresh

fresh ground: Unsupported by any ally, having by our petulance and inabilities just affronted our natural ones; uncertain whether our East-India possessions will be first wrested from us by our natural enemies, or by the servants of the company joined to and acting under the country powers; a more defenceless condition we ourselves cannot look on, or shew a more inviting one to an enemy. Add to this, that our chief resource of seamen, lately cut off by the Americans, at the fishery off Newfoundland would, of itself, send us so crippled into a war, that the event need not be foretold.

Are these ministers, by whose management and foresight, we are thus, circumstanced, not satisfied with these evils, and are they wicked and mad enough to meditate a war? I am unwillingly brought to think so ill of them. To say that it would counteract directly that point, which they have held as irrevocably determined, I mean, the SUBJECTION of the Colonies, does not

C

free

free them from that imputation: For their consistency has never held, but to the LATEST accounts that they receive, nor their measures looked forwarder than the day. But, certainly the first attendant, on a war with France, is victory decided for America. That country must be evacuated by the British troops and its allies; and these brought home may practice on the inhabitants of this island that spirit of ungovernable licence, with which they have been accustomed to treat the persons, and properties of our American Fellow-Subjects, making no distinction of age, or of sex, nor sparing the loyal more than the disloyal. But individuals, you will be told, must submit to such inconveniences for the GOOD of the WHOLE. The Americans at full liberty, will turn their arms against that part of the Continent, still held by the Crown of Great-Britain. I think that I am not a hasty assertor, but am founded on reason, and not actuated by despondency, when I say, that those districts cannot long resist
their

their full force, and that the West-Indies instantly must fall into their hands. To prove that I have gone too far, some person must have either the ingenuity to convince me that we are equal (without recalling the army from America) to repel the whole effort of our enemies here, or must be endowed with magic art sufficient, to conjure up in Great-Britain itself a force, capable of contending with, and defeating the UNDIVERTED power of France and Spain. For it is evident already, that in America our army can make no impression; and that the navy has received a wound in the very quarter, from which its natural strength arises; and felt a disgrace, which an Englishman is mortified to acknowledge,

If a war then with France is so necessary, and that the people are so irritated, as not to sit down one moment under the treatment they have received; if Great-Britain is too impatient to avenge herself, and cannot wait for the

judicious time of doing so, let a peace with America be the preliminary of this act of justice: For joined with America, these kingdoms may again give the law to France, and CONCESSIONS, which sound policy certainly, and which justice and reason, perhaps, equally call for, may reinstate this country again in its former splendor; when, I will be bold to say, no other measure can avail us, or can save us from those calamities, which are gathering on every side, and ready to burst on our heads. In proportion, as Great-Britain then feels the necessity of breaking with the court of France, it would be the highest absurdity, not in equal pace to wish to meet the Colonies with more indulgent terms. Peace with our Fellow-Subjects, so desirable before, becomes then necessary at any rate; and that ministry would not long escape impeachment, who would venture to engage in a war with a foreign power, before a Reconciliation had taken place, and reunion was once more established in this distracted

tracted empire. But if, unfortunately, this American contest is to continue, which every day proves to us, is, and will be productive of every evil; the wiser part would be, in such case, to dissemble our just anger. In the Roman state, this was a fundamental maxim and contributed greatly to the rise and grandeur of it. That warlike people constantly passed over unnoticed any injuries or affronts offered to them, whilst engaged in one war, and deferred their resentment, till a peace with the enemy allowed them to march their victorious legions, and punish their adventurous and ill-advised aggressor. Even at the time, when that empire had rose to the zenith of greatness, and the dread of its arms maintained the whole in tranquility, and gave Augustus the peaceful opportunity of shutting the Temple of Janus, it is worthy remarking, what a prudent use that fortunate prince made of a situation, which few conquerors could have held with so much moderation. SÆTONIUS marks it

it as a common saying of his, and it is so strongly expressed by that author, and to no political pursuit so applicable as to our own, that I should take off from the force, by attempting to give his thoughts in other words than his own; *Prælium quidem aut bellum suscipiendum omnino, negabat, nisi cum major emolumenti spes quam damni metus ostenderetur. Nam minima comoda, non minimo sectantes discrimine, similes, aiebat, esse aureo hamo piscantibus, cujus abrupti damnum nullâ capturâ pensari posset,*

From these reflections, and from every consideration that can be given to the business, I am apt to think that one and the same conclusion must be drawn by every person, who will dispassionately investigate the subject. It will, and must result from such a disquisition, that a disunion from America is the greatest loss that can befall this country; that a junction of these our Colonies with France will make a war
with

with this last power, before so undesirable, become then the danger of all others, which Great-Britain has the most reason to dread, and which our rulers are bound in duty to use all possible means to prevent. The event of things has changed totally our situation; and those who have been mistaken hitherto in their notions of the consequences of a war, which they promoted, should not be ashamed candidly to avow, that they have been in an error: particularly when they acted in, and out of parliament, on such information as was there laid before them, and to which, secluded from all other, they too implicitly trusted. Moreover, the efforts, that have been made by the Provincials on their own continent, give full ground to look on the whole business in a quite different light. These have astonished all Europe, and their actions by sea have raised even the surprize of those, who knew that they had in themselves resources equal to the other.

Let

Let every person, who thought that the war could terminate with advantage to the mother-country, and from different motives pressed it on; let each ask himself how probable, or how impossible it is, that such views should be answered; and from thence draw his conclusion, whether, or not, any measure whatsoever would not have been better, or should not now be adopted, rather than to continue engaged in this ruinous scheme one moment longer. It would be vain indeed, to expect to close at this time, when we feel the impracticability of coercion, on the same terms as would gladly have been fallen into, within a twelvemonth past: but alas! at that time, UNCONDITIONAL submission alone was publicly held forth, and ministry was deaf to every other idea; whereas now, every one is questioned (as he arrives) whether any treaty can be opened, on any other ground, than that of Independency. This is the fact, and such is our situation; and from thence may be drawn
the

the hopes that reasonably may be formed of the effects of any future success. Each day that an opening to peace is delayed, serves but to convince the Americans, that a little more perseverance decides every point in their favor; and on the other hand; Great-Britain has the mortification to discover the growing strength of the enemy, with whom she is contending; and terms of accommodation must in proportion appear less palatable to the Mother Country. I have from the beginning of these hostilities, dreaded this delay, convinced that such an accommodation might have been made, as would have fixed for ages, the essential interests of both parties, when the last petition of the Congress was so unluckily flighted. To look back, lamenting that such opportunities were neglected, cannot now avail; unless we draw from those mistakes this lesson, not to repeat them. It may not yet be too late. To reunite with America ought, and must be the first object for this country, and I trust

D

that

that it is not yet impossible: If the Colonies have curbed their animosity with more temper than we have done, they may not yet have thrown themselves into the arms of any foreign power: And to prevent this from happening will yet, I trust, be the effort of this country. France may not yet hold the Colonies bound by any treaty; and they may still have kept themselves open to negotiation with the Mother-Country: The advantages, however, which France has to offer these Colonies, and to receive in return, are too obvious, for any one to expect that such a connection will not every day become more close. This whole subject requires but to be thought upon without passion, prejudice, and pride, and the part, which the material interests of Great-Britain call this nation to take, will escape the discernment of no one. Are we arrived at that moment when we can divest ourselves of such passions? I do hope that the infatuation, which had seized the inhabitants of this country,

try, is now wearing off; and that they no longer continue in that prepossessed state, when no reason could awaken them from their delirium, nor any arguments prevail on them, fairly to consider every consequence of a zeal so ill directed,

Few had looked deeper than the circumstance itself, into the nicest and most refined point that can almost arise, in the consideration and nature of government; finding that the authority of parliament was not allowed to be all-powerful, through every part of the dominions of this crown, the nation fired at the word, and confident in their power to maintain such authority, forgot towards their fellow-subjects that justice, for which the people of this country are so eminently distinguish'd, and towards themselves, those principles which roused their ancestors at the end of the last century, to restore and confirm the constitution. They would otherwise have seen, that the exertion

5 of that right which they claimed, was wholly inconsistent with the idea of governing a free people, and that the distant subjects of this crown, once alarmed with the just apprehension of such a power, and foreseeing to what length it might be abused, sensible that no property of theirs, could be secure to themselves and to their posterity under it, have a claim to expect a mitigation of that authority on a point, which would render their happiness precarious, and deprive them of the comfort of liberty, and the blessings of that constitution, which guards and disposes of the properties of the inhabitants of Great-Britain. I do not mean to enter into any discussion of right, for the time, for this, is now past: If it had been dispassionately considered at the proper moment, perhaps it would have been found that neither in reason nor justice, such a power could have been exerted, and that, if it did exist, or could be ever so well maintained, the two foregoing principles would form

form the best criterion to determine, where sound policy should lead the Mother-Country to give way, where to have stood up at all events in support of its own authority. It never could be the intention of the nation, however it might be the wish of the court, to place any part of the subjects of the crown in this predicament,

The offence alone was felt by the bulk of the nation: We were totally insensible of the cruel apprehensions, under which we were laying those, to whom we neither wished, nor meant an injury: Meaning none, we did not make the case our own: But inflicting punishment on punishment for that, which we deemed crimes, but what every free man would construe to be a struggle only against oppression, a resistance by arms has served to exasperate the nation to a pitch, that the war is carried on with more virulence, than against the natural enemies of this country. Without deciding on the point

point of the legality of the claim, much less of the propriety of using that power consistent with any rule of equity and justice, I will only remark, that it is absurd to expect that any country would not revolt against the exercise of so alarming a power, the very instant that the inhabitants found that they had the means of resistance. The Americans have been driven to arms, and the event of the war is no longer problematical. When it was first undertaken, the nation might be divided in opinion, whether violent or lenient measures would be most likely to effectuate a good understanding with the Colonies. But now the impracticability of subduing them by force, must be made clear to every man. If it is impracticable, and on the fullest trial found to be so, common sense directs the nation to alter its course, and no longer to persist in a pursuit, in which, success itself can never bring about the object, we ought to have in view, RECONCILIATION, but defeat be attended with disgrace

disgrace and ruin. May I ask those gentlemen, who pressed on this civil war from the desire of maintaining at all hazards an acknowledgment of the supremacy of parliament IN ALL CASES WHATSOEVER, over every part of the dominions of this crown, whether the very means, by which they thought of carrying that point, has not given the Americans such an opportunity of feeling their own strength, as to make that object totally hopeless? If then the principal ground with most people, for entering into this war, as impolitic as it is unnatural, should be felt to be unattainable (as past all doubt it now is) can those, who promoted these measures, with as much zeal, as want of discernment of the true interests of their country, atone so properly for the injuries, which, unwillingly, I grant, they have caused, as by a hearty junction, with those, who honestly differed from them at first, and who desire now, only to meet them on the plan, most likely to save a sinking state. Those even,

even, who were led away by visionary schemes of drawing from that part of the dominions of this crown an ostensible revenue, may without charge of inconsistency, take part with those I have mentioned, and FOR ONCE direct their course so, as to forward, and not destroy the source from which, in a great measure, our riches arise. How easy would it be to prove to this set of men their delusion, to state to them their total ignorance on the matter, and of the means, by which nations acquire wealth? But to those who do not see, that the Americans were in reality taxed by us, and paying in every article exported from this country towards our revenue, from the light which the manufacturer receives through his cottage-window from Heaven, down to the soal of the shoe he treads on, it would be flinging away one's time to argue: Although, it is as easy to demonstrate, as it will be difficult to make it up to every labourer and to every manufacturer, as soon as foreign markets

kets have been able elsewhere to supply themselves with those commodities, which hitherto have been demanded from this country. And it is too childish a confidence to imagine, that the foreigners, who now enjoy the profit of carrying these articles, will leave us that of manufacturing them, whenever they can be supplied as well, or cheaper, at any other market. I am confident that the happiest turn the war can take (if it is to be a war) would be, that matters should remain, nearly as they are, on each side, without further effusion of kindred blood. For nations, as well as single men, in action are more easily hurried on by their leaders, and have less leisure to consider the consequences of keeping up their anger. But this is not to be expected: Our commissioners, as military men attached to the honor of their separate services, must, and will act; for they are not furnished with a power to treat, except on such conditions, as are not worthy of the word, and too

E

futile

futile for any one now to think, that an accomodation can be brought about under them.

Unfortunately this step, like every other, has been so contrived, as to give to the leaders of Independence in the Colonies, an opportunity of fixing the Americans in the very disposition, in which they desire to hold them: It has served only to confirm their belief that the king's ministers meant to deceive; as they had sent out negociators, without obtaining from parliament that authority, which alone could give credit to a treaty. By these and such means have a party got the superiority in the Colonies, which neither their numbers, nor their influence could otherwise have given to them. For this success they are indebted to our ministers here, and whenever these times shall hereafter be canvassed, it will appear, that each violent determination here verified their assertions, and raised up that party, which would easily have been over-ruled,

ruled, until the FATAL rejection of the last petition stripped their adversaries of any argument they could still use, to prevent the people of America from flinging off all subjection to Great-Britain. We, who are further from the scene of action, have yet leisure to think ; therefore let us not reject the opportunity, nor be seduced away from truth, by accounts favourable to our arms : for none can effectuate, however alluring they may appear, the purposes of reconciliation. I will even venture to affirm, that, in the event of our arms proving successful, the decided purpose of the French court is to advance with further assistance to the Colonies ; having long since, I am confident, determined to go every length, rather than to ALLOW harmony to be restored again between Great-Britain and the Colonies. Sorry indeed, am I to say ALLOW : for it is the reproach which we lie under ; and we ought to feel that the efforts we are making in America, feeble as they appear, are at

the good-will of France, able by a declaration of war at once to stop the progress of our arms, and to compel us to recall our force, in order to defend our own coast. The plan is well laid by the court of France, and our rash measures have given them the ground to build it up. One must however be too blind, not to see clearly through it, and not to take the speediest method to prevent such insidious designs.

By an immediate closing with the Colonies, this is to be done: and if our arms should be attended even with unhoped-for success, let us seize the moment, as the most practicable to bring about the salutary purpose of peace. Such a conduct, held in the moment of success, backed with terms so indulgent, as cannot be refused, will wrest the Colonies out of the hands of France, and shew to all Europe this country, rising from its misfortunes, a greater power, in some respects, than could have been conceived. But will this use
be

be made of any future success? I fear much the contrary: Our leaders are not formed with minds equal to the government of a great nation: in the exultation of the moment they will forget the alarms of the preceding one. Success, purchased with the blood of our fellow-subjects, will prove, in their hands, the instrument only by which they will lead us into fresh troubles.

It is natural to ask me, after having reprobated so entirely the abilities, and intention of administration as I have, What plan I could myself lay down for peace? or on what terms I would propose to meet the Americans? The question, I acknowledge, is a difficult one, and not easily to be answered; but I can venture to assert, that no peace with America can be brought about by those, who have directed these measures, and by whom the war has been managed. I am no party man, and do not think by advancing this, that I make myself liable to the appellation: for their names and characters are too odious in America,

America, their designs too much suspected, every calamity laid particularly to their charge, that this nation would treat to the greatest disadvantage, whilst they are at the helm. Besides, among the grievances complained of in the petitions of the Americans, let us not forget, that by the removal of these very ministers, they hope to see the opening made for the redress of the remainder. I trust in the wisdom, and goodness of the prince on the throne, that the well-being of this nation is not to be sacrificed to the ambitious views of such ministers;

Noſtem peccatis & fraudibus objice nubem.

As calamities advance, for they must inevitably befall us, a change of men, as well as of measures will take place; and a great minister be called from his retirement, to help us from our distress. Circumstanced as we are, he alone, who united a divided people, and carried them with glory through the last war, is equal to the task. His talents, weight and authority,

authority, can bring together those lords and gentlemen, who have NOBLY stood forth in opposition to these destructive measures; for they must form the main body of the administration; joining with them all such as shall see their error, and be willing to form a part of a great COALITION, capable of giving confidence to the people, who will pour down their blessings, in return, on his Majesty, under whose sanction the noble Lord may be permitted to engage in so meritorious a work. I cannot help flattering myself that the day is at hand, when you, my fellow-subjects, will feel the necessity of these measures; and that meetings will soon be called in your respective counties, in order to form, and carry up constitutional petitions to parliament; imploring a speedy end to be put to our sufferings, from this civil war, and beseeching them to prevent the dangers wherewith we are threatned. Such a disposition, so expressed by you, will facilitate

facilitate the means, and give your representatives the fullest opportunity of meeting these wishes, and forwarding the honest endeavors of those, to whom the nation must look up, as the only men capable of redeeming a state so distempered, both within and without, as to present no other flattering prospect of recovery.

I am thoroughly sensible that there is too much matter huddled together, for the space of this short pamphlet; and the reader may with propriety accuse me, of leaving many arguments, not sufficiently elucidated, to uphold the frequent assertions. This has arisen, in part from a persuasion, that most of my conclusions will strike, after a short consideration, the minds both of those who are informed, and of those, who are not too far prejudiced; and in part, from a desire of avoiding the imputation of being tedious. This last charge would condemn unheard any political writing whatever in these days; when
the

the fashion prevails of drowning all thought, not leading to pleasure or dissipation. Besides, my meaning is only to give you matter, to think upon; well convinced, that if I can obtain this, the business is done. Nothing can be so wild as the HASTY decisions of the public: But when they are guided by REFLECTION, it is then that *Vox Populi*, really becomes, *Vox Dei*.

THE END.



